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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Belize's Media Professionals Strengthen Their Capacity on Suicide Reporting**

*Belmopan, April 30, 2025.*

The Pan American Health Organization, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Wellness (MoHW) and the Centre for Mental Health Law and Policy of the Indian Law Society, hosted a two-day training workshop for media professionals on suicide reporting.

“Suicide remains a significant public health concern globally, with more than 720,000 people dying by suicide every year,” shared Dr. Karen Roberts, PAHO/WHO Technical Advisor for Non-Communicable Diseases and Mental Health in Belize. “The factors that contribute to suicide and its prevention are complex and not fully understood. However, there is overwhelming and ever-increasing evidence that the media can play a significant role in either enhancing suicide prevention efforts or weakening them.”

The workshop focused on the responsible reporting of suicide cases and aimed to equip media professionals, including reporters, journalists, editors, influencers, and public relations and communication officers, among others, with the tools necessary to address mental health issues sensitively while adhering to established guidelines for suicide prevention and reporting.

Suicide remains a taboo topic and a public health issue in Belize. Responsible media coverage plays a key role in both mitigating and preventing suicide. The impact of how suicide is reported can either promote awareness that may prevent other suicides from occurring or increase the risk of imitative behaviors among vulnerable persons.

“The media holds extraordinary power—the power to shape narratives, challenge stereotypes, spark hope, and create change,” said Dr. Melissa Diaz-Musa, Director of Public Health and Wellness of the MoHW. “We are not asking to avoid difficult stories. We are asking to tell these stories responsibly—in a way that honors the dignity of every person affected, and for the media to see themselves as partners in mental health advocacy.”

The workshop centered on key objectives, including:

- Increasing awareness about the importance of mental health and addressing mental health stigma and suicide prevention.
- Building the capacity of media professionals to report responsibly on suicide, emphasizing privacy, sensitivity, and avoiding harmful details.
- Enhancing the capacity of media professionals to manage their mental health when reporting on traumatic situations.
- Collaborating to develop a monitoring and evaluation framework to assess media reports on suicides and suicide attempts.

In addition to the workshop, consultations will take place with senior media professionals, public health officials, and representatives from government and non-governmental organizations to gather information and feedback on the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework for suicide reporting.

By incorporating interactive presentations, case studies, and group discussions, the workshop engaged 16 participants in hands-on training that promotes a greater understanding of suicide, stigma, and mental health.

PAHO/WHO Belize, along with the MoHW and partners, remain committed to ensuring that suicide prevention remains a top priority. As part of this ongoing effort, an in-country mission will also be held in the upcoming week to review and update the Police Training Manual, specifically focusing on improving protocols for handling situations with individuals with mental health challenges and suicide-related cases.

The Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) works with the countries of the Americas to improve the health and quality of life of their populations. Founded in 1902, it is the world's oldest international public health agency. It serves as the Regional Office of WHO for the Americas and is the specialized health agency of the Inter-American system.

## **Ends**

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